



**Transcript**  
**Episode 3.3**  
**Book 3, Chapter 3: The Knight Bus**

Caroline: You're listening to Harry Potter After 2020, an HP chapter reread podcast wherein two friends who read the books way back in the day as adults revisit the series through a post-2020 lens. Your hosts are Lorrie Kim, author of *Snape: The Definitive Analysis*, and JC, an educator and long-time HP fan. I'm your editor, Caroline. In this episode, Lorrie and JC tackle Book Three, Chapter Three: The Knight Bus.

Lorrie: The Knight Bus. Harry performs underage magic, storms out of Privet Drive and then wonders what's going to happen next. World building ensues. Harry discovers that the stakes are even higher this year than they were last year. Wow, we're starting an adventure into unknown spaces now. JC, what do you think?

JC: Before I even started reading the chapter, the title of it brought up all these great memories for me. The Knight Bus, I've been twice. I've been fortunate enough, twice in my life, to be able to go to the studios where the movies were filmed -- which is outside of London -- once with a group of fan friends (which was amazing), and then once with my family. The Knight Bus is there on the lot, the actual one that they use.

Lorrie: THE Knight Bus.

JC: THE Knight Bus. You can stand outside of it and take pictures, you can look inside. Even before starting this, I remember being there, standing in front of this giant purple bus, this three-story bus. Oh, it's a wonderful place. If anyone ever has the chance to go, it's really a lot of fun to go to those movie studios and see the original sets and so many of the original props, to walk down Diagon Alley, to walk into the Great Hall. I think that's the highlight for most folks. But yeah, the Knight Bus. That was my first thought, 'Oh, my God, the Knight Bus.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Wow. Yeah, and it is a magical space, and the fact that the Knight Bus is so not perfect -- it's messy, it's poorly driven -- it makes it so relatable.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: And lovable.

JC: It's one of the things that I think I really do enjoy about the world building. The Wizarding World seems kind of chaotic and only barely functional in a lot of ways.

Lorrie: What's holding this together? Yeah.

JC: Yeah. It's not that different from the non-magical world, so I really like that idea that permeates these books: that magic is not going to fix your problems.

Lorrie: No.

JC: I think that's really a very human aspect of these books.

Lorrie: Or only to the extent that duct tape will.

JC: Yeah. You don't have a dishwasher? There's a spell for that. But okay, there's still dishes to do. Like that meme about, 'I did the laundry, but there's more laundry!'

Lorrie: Oh, God, not again. Yeah.

JC: There's always going to be more laundry, whether you do it with magic or electricity.

Lorrie: I like that Harry in Book Three is faced with this conundrum and he starts making a plan. He thinks, 'Okay, since I've already broken the law, I can charm my trunk, I can use my cloak, I can use my broom, I'll do this, I'll do that. And then what awaits me is, I don't know, life as an outlaw.' But it's so much more mature than the childhood that he and Ron were in when they had the flying car. 'No, these are resources I have.' Literally resources, and he also is aware that he's still going to be in trouble.

JC: Yeah. I really love that way that he very calmly says, "Okay, here's what I've got to do to survive. Okay, I've already broken the law, I'm probably going to be expelled." How many times has he now thought he's going to get expelled from Hogwarts? This is maybe three or four... The other thing that really stands out about this to me is that he now knows who he is.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He has this sense of his identity as a wizard, and no one can take that away from him. Even if he can't go back to Hogwarts, even if he can't really be part of the Wizarding world, he still has this magic and he knows how to use it and he can use it in his life. It makes me think about maybe queer folks, or people who've been rejected by their family for a variety of reasons. Your family can reject you, society can reject you, but they cannot take away who you are on the inside. This identity is yours, and you get to keep it.

Lorrie: And he does know a little more about the Wizarding World now enough to know that, okay, he's going to start life as an outlaw. There is such a life, and that's a lot more knowledge than he had a year ago.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: He does have a little more of an idea of what he's going into, but he still doesn't know, 'Well, what happens to people, then, when you're an outlaw?' Because he's now partially an outsider to the Muggle world, and he's now partially an outsider (he believes) to the Wizarding world. He's about to find out that there are more layers of scaffolding that they

haven't told them about. That's good preparation for him to understand the position Sirius is in, since he is very much an outlaw in both worlds to the extreme. Harry's more protected than Sirius, but he's starting to explore what happens on the outside of what you're supposed to do in this new world. Then he's being watched again from the hedges by something more mysterious than Dobby, and that sets the tone for this whole book, I think. There's a sign. Is it friendly? Is it an omen? Is it evil? It could be any of these things. Whatever it is, it's there for Harry, and he has to figure this out. There's nothing at this point giving him any hints about whether it's friendly or malign or something that he doesn't understand yet; the fact that this Sirius Black, escaped convict, killed 13 people with a single curse is like, 'Okay, there's magnitudes of evil that you don't know yet.' Even the Basilisk could only petrify a couple of beings at a time. 'Okay, 13 people with a single curse, all right. What is this? I don't know. You've got a broom, you've got a cloak. You've got a wand at this point. Now what?' And I love that -- as we'll find out later in this book: a black dog is considered to be the 'Grim', which is a bad omen, but it might also just be a dog. I also like that it's a synonym for depression, which is going to be a major theme in this book. We've known from the first chapter that there's a person called Sirius Black, so we know, 'Okay, that's a black dog. We're waiting for a black dog to show up. Okay, we've been told from the beginning that this is going to be important. Here we go.'

JC: 'And here we go.' Right, exactly.

Lorrie: He flags down the Knight Bus by accident. He accidentally stumbles upon this first, new layer of scaffolding that he didn't know about; nobody bothered to tell them that there's such a thing as transport for a stranded witch or wizard, and it's conducted by two men who are named after the author's grandfathers.

JC: Oh, I didn't know that.

Lorrie: Yeah, Stan and Ernie, so I guess Grandpa Ernie must have been a terrible driver. It's lovable and friendly as we've said, but also the Knight Bus is not completely stable or trustworthy. The fact that Harry gets on and instantly he's like, 'I better hide my scar,' he's not at ease. He's not protected. He's somewhat protected, but he's still wary.

JC: It has this feeling to me of, like in the early part of the 20th century, people would jump on boxcars of trains and go where that train -- and they'd have to jump off to avoid the police or whatever, but there was this community of people. That's what it made me think of, is Harry's jumping on the boxcar going God knows where. It's got that feeling to it. I really love the introduction of the Knight Bus. I think it's one of the most fun introductions of the Wizarding World, outside of the first book where you first get all these glimpses of Hogwarts. There's something about the Knight Bus that feels really fun to me. The fact that it does open a window into what the wider Wizarding world looks like, and it's the first time that Harry -- even later in the book, when Harry thinks back to, 'What if I get kicked out? What am I going to do? Oh maybe I could be like Stan Shunpike and help with the Bus.' It opens up to Harry that there's a whole part of the Wizarding community that is not just Hogwarts. There's all these people that don't all necessarily have the same level of education; just like in regular society, there are lots of people who do lots of different things. But there's something about this constant danger and discomfort that seems to be part of the experience of being a wizard somehow. That's kind of wild, yeah. It's not like the cushy Hogwarts Express, where the trolley cart comes by. No this is...

Lorrie: It's rattly, yeah.

JC: The first person who gets off looks like she's about to vomit on her way out the door.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, I love Madam Marsh. I love Madam Marsh. I am not sure, but I'll keep an eye out for this: I think she's on and nauseated every single time Harry's on the Knight Bus.

JC: Really? Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: Madam Marsh, yeah.

JC: Oh, wow, yeah. If you have any kind of motion sickness, this is not your favorite mode of transportation, I'm sure.

Lorrie: And she's reliant on it.

JC: But also, it's cool to think that there is something like this, right?

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: The fact that you could raise your wand if you had nowhere to get to or needed to go, and this bus would show up, and for... I don't know if eleven Sickles is a lot of money or not, to be honest, but for a certain amount of money, it will take you where you need to go. It's really interesting that that exists.

Lorrie: And it expands the fantasy, because it's running roughshod all over the Muggle world and then Stan says, "Well, the Muggles don't even pay attention; they don't even look." That expands the fantasy that we readers could be walking along our lives, but if we're fantasizing that we're magical and we can raise our wands, then instantly the magic is there. It's in between the seams of everyday life anywhere. That's a fantasy that you can have now. "Oh, yeah, well, if I were really magical, then that bus would be right here, right now." And the half a dozen brass bedsteads with candles and brackets... that's such a --

JC: And the beds are moving and the candles are... Oh, my God.

Lorrie: That's such a cozy sleepover feeling. That's not hard to recreate with a bunch of sheets and pillows in your living room with your friends.

JC: True, or at a hotel at a con.

Lorrie: Yes. Yeah, I was thinking sleepovers with kids, but maybe people who are a little bit older than kids. And the world building, there's so much. To me, it's iconic when Stan says, "For 15 Sickles, you get a hot water bottle and a toothbrush in the color of your choice." 'Color of your choice' is sort of like a cat or...

JC: Or an owl, or a toad, or whatever it was.

Lorrie: You can be a cat or an owl or a toad... yeah, and the capitalized OR. It's really iconic. Okay, toothbrush in the color of your choice. Who's on the Knight Bus picking, "I think I want

a purple toothbrush." And God, the way you can pay for hot chocolate, and that the bus lurches, and Stan pours it all over the pillow.

JC: And then he doesn't get it. That's it, that's his hot chocolate. I was so bummed for Harry that he didn't even get the hot chocolate after all this.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, my God.

Lorrie: That's so real. We don't know... does Harry know a cleaning spell for it, or does his pillow just sop and smell of chocolate the whole ride?

JC: Oh, my gosh. Another thing that really fascinates me about this scene is thinking about what kind of magical theory is behind how this bus works. It seems to be described as traveling along, but if a wizard anywhere -- I guess anywhere in Britain -- raises their wand, it instantly apparates to that spot, picks up that wizard and goes back to where it was, and then I guess you're in the queue.

Lorrie: Right!

JC: You're at the end of the queue, and wherever you're going is added to the list. It seems like it operates maybe in a slightly different dimension, in the sense that it squeezes around things, things jump out of its way. But I wondered if the things jumping out of its way is just from the perspective of -- I'm starting to think quantum theory -- if you're on the inside, then the perspective is that houses and things are jumping out of your way, but really it's that you're in this other dimension that you're traveling through. And the fact that Ernie just seems to be like randomly turning the wheel like a three-year-old in a toy car.

Lorrie: Exactly.

JC: Randomly turning the wheel.

Lorrie: Or maybe your grandfather that you wish wouldn't drive.

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah. There's so much interesting stuff happening there.

Lorrie: There must be a spell on the Knight Bus as a container, because I think you're right that it's apparating, but usually you feel the apparition.

JC: There's a description of a bang and everything jolts. There is that, but yeah.

Lorrie: There must be a spell on it so that the bus itself feels that squeezing sensation, and if you're in it you just get jolted. You don't get squeezed. Yeah, no, this is pure fun, including the comedy of the poor, nauseated Madam Marsh.

JC: Oh, my gosh. And then we get a bunch of world building.

Lorrie: Yeah, and the comedy bit that when Harry gives his name as Neville, Stan continues to call him Neville even when he finds out that it's really Harry Potter, which is adorable. And

the newspaper article about Sirius: this is one of those flat pure giveaways, those times where the author is signaling her allegorical intent. She just says, "Sirius Black is carrying a gun (a kind of metal wand that Muggles used to kill each other)."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I love how that's written. It's written so flatly in parentheses.

JC: From an American perspective, I was like, 'Really? Wizards wouldn't know what guns are,' but I was like, 'Wait, I live in Texas, where open carry is the law in the land.' It's hard for me to imagine that American wizards wouldn't know what guns are, but it was... yeah. It was a little moment where I was like, 'Wow, yeah, I'm really an American, aren't I?'

Lorrie: Yeah, and it's gotten worse in our country since the time that this book was published. There are more openly visible guns now than there were then.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: But this is one of the flat, unsentimental giveaways about this author's long game with Expelliarmus. She does think that disarmament is the way, and she does think that there's only one thing that guns are. This isn't like hunting guns or whatever non-murderous legitimate purpose that people say guns are for. We'll learn later that this equates to Avada Kedavra. What can you do to defend yourself? Not much. You can dodge, that's it. You can hope that they have Stormtrooper aim, but a shield isn't going to help all that much. All right, he's got a gun, or in Wizard terms, he's not afraid to use Avada Kedavra, so there the author has indicated her stance. And then we get the rumor from Stan that Sirius thought he would be Voldemort's second-in-command for doing this, and that's so like the previous chapter when Harry has to say, "Yes, I'm going to Saint Brutus's Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys." It's so far away from your true self, and there's so little hope of trying to defend yourself or explain yourself. You just have to accept that this is what people think of you and they're going to punish you accordingly. It's like, 'Really?' Okay. Sirius, that's what they think of him. There's no use in fighting it. These people are not interested in your protest of innocence. And then Stan fills in Harry and says that after Sirius is caught after the curse, "he went with them quiet as anything, still laughing his head off," and we know that Harry has just had to constrain himself. Earlier that night even, he has to not say anything in his own defense because there's absolutely nothing he can do, and then we get Stan and Ernie saying, "Isn't he mad?" And Ernie says, "If he weren't when he went to Azkaban, he will be now." Now we get to see more deeply what Fudge exactly was doing to Hagrid in the previous volume.

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: And this is one of the hardest issues for me brought up by this series, one of the hardest ones to think about: the irrevocable waste of a person's life that happens with wrongful incarceration. I'm not saying that incarceration for people who've actually committed crimes is not a theft of life also. I mean that when it's wrongful and you've been framed, the number that does on your brain is its own separate thing, and it's very hard to think about and there's no reparations.

JC: Yeah, this took my brain to a very dark place, too, last night when I was really thinking

through all of that, the same kinds of things I was thinking about. First of all, we start hearing in this chapter about the guards of Azkaban, and that in the end of the chapter Fudge talks about them using the same terminology, which we're going to find out what they are shortly. But that idea that the guards are pretty horrifying and very dangerous, and even the notion that the guards are angry, we're starting to see that maybe the guards are really the ones who run the prison and there's not any other kind of oversight. It's starting to sound like a pretty horrific place, and going back and thinking about the fact that Hagrid was sent there for a couple of months on a whim for PR, it is incredibly horrifying. It makes you think, 'Okay, are there worse things than capital punishment (because capital punishment came up in the previous chapter)?' It seems like the Wizarding world has decided that yeah, there are worse things. "People that we think deserve it, we're going to subject them to that," and that's dark.

Lorrie: And now that you're talking about it this way, it's making me realize wizards have abdicated responsibility for Azkaban to the Dementors, because the Dementors, that's their nature. This is what they do. Maybe it's too emotionally difficult on wizards to be punishing inmates all the time. They can't face the whole horrific reality of what it is to be a prison guard; they'll outsource it, but that means that they're abdicating, letting these beings be in a position of power where if they decide to revolt -- if they decide to take power -- what are we going to do about it? My mind is going a couple different, equally dark places with this, and one of them is, "If he weren't when he went to Azkaban, he will be now." If you pair that reality with the other reality that there are entire populations that are tracked into a 'something-to-prison' pipeline...

JC: School-to-prison pipeline.

Lorrie: School-to-prison, or poverty to prison, or a certain race, anything that pre-tracks you into that pipeline... Well, maybe you were perfectly innocent as an individual before then, but if your individuality doesn't matter and you get sent to the prison, then you will become that. And if it's like Hagrid being sent for PR, then your individuality really does not matter to whoever is sending you there. Your job to yourself, as much as humanly possible, is to try to hang on to who you really are and not become that thing to the extent that you can, which nobody's pretending is going to be easy. But then the other dark thing that just occurred to me when you were talking: I am currently, with no joy, trying to listen to the Witch Trials of J.K. Rowling podcast series, and I have to stop frequently and... Wow, it's really not a rewarding experience. It's very joyless and difficult to listen to the justifications for why we should scapegoat trans people and make this population of humans a receptacle for projections and fears. The most recent thing that I was listening to (before I had to turn it off two days ago, and I haven't had the guts to go back yet) was talking about how allegedly dangerous it is to allow people to self-identify their genders when they're being held in prisons. This argument that Rowling is behind is saying that you're supposed to have some sort of gatekeeping mechanism with therapy or medical interventions -- or some proof other than just the person's say-so that they are whatever gender they claim -- because of the theoretical argument that people with penises who are really men are going to claim that they're women in order to have access to women's prisons to assault the other inmates. This is a theory; this is one of those things, like rumors of cheating at voting (voter fraud) where they say, "Oh, well, I heard in another county somewhere that they found one ballot; this proves it." It's this weird determination that if you can find one exception, that proves the whole rule. They're like, "People say that no, that never happens, but we did hear about once that did happen." I'm listening to this, thinking, 'In women's prisons and in men's prisons, assault of prisoners does happen. Who's committing those assaults? If you took all

of the assaults that ever happened and did something to reduce that danger, I don't think that hunting down and eliminating self-identified trans people is going to make a difference in that number, but there's the issue of guards. Are prison guards responsible for some percentage of assault on prisoners? Well, who's going to stop them if they are?' The thought of a prison as like a bathroom, a contested space, is so full of projection, especially when it's being bandied about by people projecting and making up theories and then advocating for legislation who don't think of prison as a place that they're likely to be.

JC: Yes, or that if you are there, it's because you deserve to be there. It makes me think of all those arguments I hear from conservatives about how prisoners shouldn't have access to health care while they're in prison; because they're in prison, they don't deserve it. Why should they get all this free stuff that they didn't get on the outside? Oh, in the state that I live in, there are plenty of prisons where they don't have heating or air conditioning, because that's apparently a luxury. And in the summer...

Lorrie: When it's 110 degrees...

JC: Yes. People die. "Oh, they're just prisoners. They're trash, anyway." That's literally the way that I heard these people being talked about, and it's so dark and disturbing. It's reminding me, the fact that Hagrid was again thrown in... To get us back to the book, Hagrid was just put in there for two months, like, "Oh, it'll be fine." But it's the most horrific torture to be in that place.

Lorrie: "It'll be fine because you don't matter."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "Your beinghood is nothing compared to my political reputation, which is obviously important."

JC: Yeah. "You're going to be traumatized."

Lorrie: "Whatever."

JC: "You'll get over it."

Lorrie: "If I cared, but I don't."

JC: Right, yeah. Yeah, it's really dark.

Lorrie: Yeah, which is actually different. What Fudge is doing to Hagrid is just indifference, as opposed to joyfully inflicting pain. We've heard Vernon say, "Oh, these kinds of people... hanging's the only thing that they deserve," or, "They need to be punished. I will feel better if they are punished."

JC: Right, even though there's tons of evidence that punishment actually doesn't do anything.

Lorrie: Right. If you think that people don't deserve free stuff in prison, maybe we should make incarceration less of a common thing. That's cost effective; way more, actually.



JC: Oh, for sure.

Lorrie: But yeah, the difference between people who talk about Azkaban as a theoretical and characters who are actually there or at risk of being there... We'll find out way later that Dumbledore has experience with Azkaban, that he had an incarcerated family member, and a number of these characters we're going to find had really close dealings with it. Then there are people who are tracked from birth to just never be at serious risk of ever going. To go way, way ahead to The Prince's Tale at the end of *Deathly Hallows*, that comes up in the conversation between kid Lily and kid Snape, when Lily's worried that if she does some sort of minor infraction, will they send her to Azkaban, and Snape looks at her and says, "No, you're too..." and then he doesn't finish the sentence. 'You're too what?' There's a number of reasons why, but Snape is quite right: Lily is never going to go to Azkaban.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. And people making up all sorts of policy suggestions about what should be done around gender and single-sex prisons: what do they know about the danger of being in a prison? I don't personally know. I have not actually been inside a prison, but I'm also not saying that, "Wow, if you do this one weird trick, we'll make it some sort of paradise of safety for all the inmates."

JC: Yeah. I do know people who have been incarcerated, and I think having a friend or a family member who's been incarcerated will change your perspective-- it should. Will? No. Should it? Yes -- change your perspective on the whole prison system and the way that we treat prisoners. In fact, one of the childhood markers of trauma, one of the things that we put on the list of "check off: has this kid been traumatized," is a parent has been incarcerated.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So it's clearly something that we know as a society is really disruptive and harmful not only to the person we're incarcerating, but also to the families of that person, and we also know that it's really difficult for there to be good outcomes for people who have been incarcerated for certain amounts of time. Yeah. It's... ugh. So yeah, bringing that back in the Wizarding world, how do you get out of Azkaban? I guess the government goes to the Dementors and says, "Give us that one." What if the Dementors say no?

Lorrie: "Their sentence is over."

JC: Yeah. Okay. Well, then, what happens? Are you reintegrated into society somehow? Do you have a chance to deal with the trauma of having been in that place, having been psychologically tortured for however long you were in there? Probably not.

Lorrie: Right, and who's going to take care of you after you come out, having been turned into whatever it is that a person turns into after all that trauma? Who's taking care of you? The fact that Sirius was there when he was innocent puts a whole, sick twist on it. For years -- many, many, many years -- I had a really hard time thinking about the character of Sirius Black, because when I thought about which 12 years of his life were just stolen from him forever and will never be taken back, it was so, so much something that happens in real life to real people. I just couldn't think about it. It was so, so awful.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Ugh. We will find in this series that quite a few characters have fathers who were incarcerated, the most consequential of them being Dumbledore. Who was counseling him and Aberforth while their father was incarcerated? They were difficult children to begin with for widely varying reasons, but we'll see that when there are students in this series whose fathers are incarcerated that both Dumbledore and Snape get that instant, "Okay, I have to look after them. Somebody check up on them." We'll see that happening. With Harry, this is happening, too; Sirius being Harry's godfather... It really is like having a family member, but he doesn't know that yet.

JC: Not yet. Yeah, we haven't gotten there yet.

Lorrie: I know.

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: What he does know is Stan says, "Never been a breakout from Azkaban before, has there, Ern?" "Beats me how he did it," which, of course, we get the delicious reveal later that no, there had been, but that's a new, deeper level of power and evil that we haven't met yet. But it does set us up now for Sirius's powers being exceptional, and for all of these laws and rules being of a greater magnitude than Harry has seen before when this is something that even the Wizarding prison system is not set up to contain.

JC: That's so interesting that Harry has this immediate fear upon learning a little bit more about Azkaban. He knew it existed before, but learning a little bit more about it, he immediately thinks that blowing up his aunt is probably a crime that is worthy of sending him to Azkaban; which mirrors your mention of Lily earlier, but it's also very childlike. It's that very pure understanding of the world and, for a lack of a better way of saying it, of 'oh, if I do a bad thing, I can go to prison. I just did a bad thing,' and not yet understanding the layers of privilege and power in the world that actually have probably a greater impact on whether or not a person's going to go to prison or not. Harry learns about that in this chapter, too.

Lorrie: Well, that's part of the scaffolding that Harry is learning about. This is still a fairy tale. This chapter and this book is still a fairy tale, because Harry finds out that he still is protected because he's a child. People will say, "No, no, whatever you did, this degree of punishment is not for you. You're still a child; we'll still take care of you. You're school age. That's where you belong." He didn't know all this when he slammed the door on Number Four Privet Drive. As far as he knew, the Wizarding laws are so capricious that if they had just shown up and said, "Okay, well, we're going to kill you now," I don't know. Maybe that might have been it. He took a leap of faith and he's being told, "No, there's still layers of protection for you; you're still a child. Yes, that thing happened to Hagrid. It's not going to happen to you because you're a kid." He's learning this at the same time that he's knowing that there's this escaped convict for whom these protections don't exist for him, and that's such a kid feeling where he gets off the bus and the Minister of Magic is waiting for him. What?!

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah.

Lorrie: And just as is the theme throughout this whole book, yet again this weird mysterious

thing is happening that all the adults know about it or have been talking about it. Does anyone bother to tell Harry anything? No. Why? "Why is the Minister of Magic waiting for me to get off this bus?"

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I'm so impressed by Harry that he has the presence of mind to remember, 'Oh, wait, wait, I'm not supposed to have ever seen him before. I'm supposed to pretend that I don't know who this is. Okay.' So Fudge is more scaffolding. Okay, The Wizarding world, they're at least on top of this enough to have anticipated that Harry would show up, and for some reason to appear relieved about it.

JC: Right. One question I had when I was reading this was okay, how did they know? So he still has the trace on him -- which we won't learn about for multiple books -- so there's that idea that they know where underage wizards are, but the Knight Bus is in some other weird dimension. Two minutes before it appeared in London, it was in God knows where, so I'm still a little bit wondering. You can't question it too much, but a little bit of me is wondering, first of all, why Fudge? That's pretty impressive. But also, why not Dumbledore, or somebody that would show up and Harry would go, "Oh!" But yeah, why the Leaky Cauldron? Oh. It's really interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. Obviously something is happening on this mysterious grown-up and government level that nobody's telling Harry about, which is very much what it feels like to be a kid.

JC: They just know, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. It should have been Dumbledore, but no; obviously something is going on that now the government is involved, which is never a good sign. And just like the Grim, or the eyes, the black dog, Harry sees it and he knows it's important but he doesn't know: 'What way is it going to go? Is this a friend? Is this a foe?' Just like the Knight Bus came to rescue him but is not all that reliable, Harry has to gamble with his identity on the Knight Bus. Are they going to turn him in? What will happen? He automatically knows to lie. And then Fudge shows up, and he already knows from that scene in Hagrid's cabin in the previous book that Fudge is not reliable; he's not trustworthy, he's capricious. And when Harry says, "Well, I almost got expelled for doing a little bit of underage magic last year. Why are you looking at me funny when your laws and rules are so capricious?" Fudge has no answer to that, but Harry is confirming for himself and for Fudge, 'Okay, this world is unstable. Excuse me for not trusting you.'

JC: Yeah, that very clear reminder that the people in power get to decide when they're going to follow the rules and which rules they're going to enforce, and the people who don't have power just have to live with that. It's a very clear reminder of that.

Lorrie: I love the touch that when Fudge has this pointed out to him, he's so surprised. "Well, everybody knows that the rules only apply to underlings and not to me," and then you get it called out by a child? All those fables, and then a child said this and everybody realized, whoa. Yeah, Fudge has no answer to that. Here is a slightly more mature, slightly more resourceful and able Harry Potter, dealing with a world where he doesn't belong exactly and where nobody is trustworthy.

JC: And still somehow, it's preferable to the world he grew up in.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah. Meanwhile, Fudge is scarfing down tea and crumpets, and I had this intense feeling of, "I want crumpets. What are crumpets?" And I Googled crumpets, and they're like nothing I've ever actually really had before. Are they English muffins? No, not exactly. I don't know what a crumpet is, but part of the magic for an American reading this series is some of the real-life British comfort foods are just as foreign and magical to me as the made-up ones.

JC: That's true. Treacle, whatever that is, yeah.

Lorrie: I've had butterbeer in Orlando, Florida, I've had pumpkin juice in Orlando, Florida, but I've still never had a crumpet. I want a crumpet.

JC: Crumpets are real.

Lorrie: Yeah. I want to be in a little creaky inn with a ridiculous man in a bowler hat that I don't trust, eating crumpets and drinking tea, and he's offering Harry a three-week stay in this inn, obviously all expenses paid. There's no mention of money.

JC: Yeah, yeah. Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: This is on the Ministry.

JC: Yeah, and he still doesn't tell Harry that he's in danger.

Lorrie: No.

JC: "Oh, no, don't go out," and Harry's like, "Maybe if the Minister of Magic signs my form..." He's like, "No, no, it's probably best that you don't leave Hogwarts."

Lorrie: "It's probably best that I don't tell you anything."

JC: Yeah. It's like mushrooms: you feed him shit and keep him in the dark. That's the life that Harry's still living. He's a 13-year-old kid, yeah, but we know what he's been through. Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: I had not heard that about mushrooms. That's amazing.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: What I'd heard about mushrooms was you cannot kill me in any way that matters.

JC: Oh, that's also good. That's also good.

Lorrie: So Fudge tells Harry that the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad had been dispatched to Privet Drive and they punctured and obliviated Aunt Marge.

JC: It's just like Willy Wonka, where they had to juice the blueberry girl.

Lorrie: There's a... it's called Lady Oracle, a novel by Margaret Atwood, that I read a really long time ago where something like that happens. It's sort of metaphorical and sort of not. Anyway...

JC: But I have this vision now of them puncturing her and making that balloon sound.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Like a whoopee cushion sound.

JC: Yeah, and she flies around the living room.

Lorrie: And she's been obliterated, but I guess they didn't obliterate the Dursleys.

JC: Which is hilarious, and an interesting choice. But I guess the Dursleys are kind of magical world-adjacent because they've been living with Harry, but there's also some danger in that. There's this...

Lorrie: Yes, there is.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: But there were obviously negotiations with the Dursleys, because Fudge was saying, "Oh, they'll take you back as long as you spend Christmas and Easter at Hogwarts." I'm sure they said, "Yeah, sure. Okay." What were those negotiations? Who was doing it? What were they saying? Was Dumbledore there?

JC: Right, and what does now the Wizarding World -- what does the government -- know about Harry's life at the Dursleys?

Lorrie: All of this is all wrapped up in the iconic sentence: "We don't send people to Azkaban just for blowing up their aunts." Okay. Okay, we'll just live with that. And yeah, Fudge, as you mentioned, gives Harry a last warning: "Don't go into Muggle London, don't go into Hogsmeade," and leaves. And then we have the beautiful, beautiful ending of the chapter, where Harry goes into his room and there's Hedwig.

JC: Hedwig, who... again, how does the magic of owls work? It's amazing.

Lorrie: Oh, she's on his side. Ron and Hermione would be on his side, but they're both abroad, which is a great plotting detail. Yes, that is why they can't be there for him, but somebody is totally on his side. Somebody totally understands, somebody's with him; Hedwig is with him in both the Muggle and the magical worlds, and not even Vernon Dursley can keep her from going out to hunt.

JC: And then Harry is going to get to spend two weeks living in this creaky little room over the Leaky Cauldron and Diagon Alley, but the image of him having had this horrific night where he went through every stage of thinking he was going to get expelled from this world and from the school and all. 'How is he going to survive?' And now he's got this warm, little cozy room with a nice bed and a roaring fire, and Hedwig is there and he gets to stay there for two weeks without the Dursleys yelling at him. He's probably going to get to eat what he wants and roam around Diagon Alley. That sounds like heaven after the summer he's had.

Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: It does. It sounds so fun.

JC: I want to do it. Oh, my God.

Lorrie: Yeah. There's no grown-ups who are going to be watching him. He can just spend time wherever he wants. Nobody's going to be eyeing him to behave well.

JC: It sounds like a break.

Lorrie: It sounds really fun, and the Minister of Magic... he heard it from the top. No one's going to come and tell him, "No, no, no, you got that wrong."

JC: Yeah. Tom's going to keep an eye on him, but "be back by dark." It's very much like a Gen-X childhood.

Lorrie: Except with money.

JC: Except with... yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: A vault full of gold. Even at his lowest in this chapter, when he was just sitting outside of Privet Drive, he still thought, 'Well, even if it's just to live a life as an outlaw, I do still have my vault of gold. I can still go get it.'

JC: True.

Lorrie: So yeah, Harry has some things and has some identity and some magic under his belt now, and he has his trusty owl who loves him. So yeah, the author has safely gotten Harry out of the terrible summer with the Dursleys and into the magical world where he's...

JC: Once again.

Lorrie: He's fed and housed.

JC: And so far, he has left the Dursleys to go to Hogwarts three times in extremely dramatic fashion.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I'm trying to remember the rest of the books. I think he leaves in pretty dramatic fashion every time. There's never just a smooth, "Bye. Have a good summer and year," and get dropped off at King's Cross." It's been dramatic every time.

Lorrie: The barrier between Muggle and magical world is pretty difficult to overcome. And then the next chapter is The Leaky Cauldron. More world building!

JC: More world building.

Lorrie: More food and yummy coziness!

JC: And I cannot remember what happens in this chapter because I've only got the movie in my head; which, by the way, the movie version of this was so incredibly tightly written and tightly edited that it's interesting to read it more slowly. Again, I haven't read this book in a while, either. A lot of the Knight Bus scenes in particular, I think, were edited in such a way to make it feel very chaotic and very fast, and it was very interesting to read. It was a very different feeling, so I don't remember what happens in the next chapter. I'm looking forward to finding out.

Lorrie: All right. Well, next week, then.

JC: Next week!

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